



Received: 14 July 2018  
Accepted: 24 October 2018  
First Published: 30 October 2018

\*Corresponding author: Paul Thomas,  
Department of Educational Science,  
University of South-Eastern Norway,  
Drammen, Norway.  
E-mail: [hpaulsilas@hotmail.com](mailto:hpaulsilas@hotmail.com)

Reviewing editor:  
Vonzell Agosto, University of South  
Florida, USA

Additional information is available at  
the end of the article

## CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The history syllabus in post-genocide Rwanda

## Implications for teacher education

Paul Thomas<sup>1\*</sup> and Kristin Skinstad van der Kooij<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This case study examined the questions: How are relations between Hutus and Tutsis portrayed in recent History syllabi in post-genocide Rwanda, and how may the narrative about these relations affect efforts towards educating for peace? The findings were based on a content analysis of four History syllabi for Ordinary and Advanced Levels published by the Rwanda Education Board between 2008 and 2015. These findings indicate that the syllabi promulgate an ethno-nationalist narrative of Rwanda's past. In this paper, we highlight stark contradictions in the syllabi between the goals of reconciliation, unity and critical thinking and the official narrative of blame for the genocide. Although the steady hand of the ruling party has been credited with much of the success achieved in contemporary Rwanda, this study raises concern about the government's omnipresent role in shaping educational discourse. The final discussion presents the possibility for teachers to contribute to change by utilising the space for agency left by contradictions in the syllabi.

**Subjects:** Multicultural Education; Curriculum Studies; History

**Keywords:** Rwanda; history subject; content analysis; educational discourse



Kristin Skinstad van der Kooij and Paul Thomas

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Paul Thomas has a PhD in Education from King's College, London, UK. He has taught at secondary and high school level in schools in the UK and Norway. Currently, he is Associate Professor in pedagogy at the University of Southeastern Norway. His research has focused on the manner in which education intersects with religion, ethnicity/race and language, among others.

Kristin Skinstad van der Kooij has a PhD in International Education from New York University. She has been a teacher educator at New York University, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University and Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences for the past 20 years. She has teaching experience from urban and rural Norway and Sierra Leone. Her research interests are in multicultural education, multiplicity and literacy education and intercultural history education. She focuses especially on partnership between schools and libraries and museums in developing multicultural and intercultural education.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This article discusses the role of teacher education in preparing teachers to teach for sustainable peace in light of shifting political agendas. The point of departure for the discussion is a study of how inter-ethnic relations are constructed in post-genocide history syllabi in Rwanda. The study found stark contradictions between goals of critical thinking, unity and reconciliation on the one hand and the official ethno-nationalist narrative of blame for the genocide on the other. We argue that teachers need knowledge of theoretical concepts from the fields of history didactics and general didactics in order to be able to analyse the content of syllabi documents. Teachers need to study the uses of narratives about the past for political purposes in the present. Teacher education also needs to acknowledge the embeddedness of the teachers themselves in particular memory cultures and susceptibility to political propaganda, as well as agents for change through education.

## 1. Introduction

This article presents the results of a study on post-genocide Rwandan History syllabi, focusing on attributions and social relationships. The study revealed stark contradictions in the syllabi between the goals of critical thinking, unity and reconciliation on the one hand and the official ethno-nationalist narrative about the Rwandan past on the other. This narrative is based on an essentialised and conflicted notion of identity and belonging. The goal of this article is to discuss possibilities for teaching for peace when faced with these syllabi. Other researchers have also pointed out such contradictions alongside the challenges they represent to peace education in Rwanda (see, e.g., Bentrovato, 2015; Freedman et al., 2011; King, 2014; Paulson, 2015). Research has also shown that the Rwandan authorities have been largely successful in inculcating the official narrative among the population; that said, the research also cautions against conflating knowledge of the official narrative as reported to researchers with belief in the truth of this narrative among the Rwandan people (Bentrovato, 2015). Furthermore, research in the field of education in emergencies has shown that the strategy of inculcating an official narrative in support of the ruling regime is not unique to Rwanda, but is quite commonplace in post-conflict societies (Paulson, 2015). Nonetheless, there is agreement in the research community that this strategy is counter-productive to the goals of reconciliation and prevention of future conflict (King, 2014; Paulson, 2015).

Furthermore, research has shown that such narratives are often resistant to change (Paulson, 2015, p. 23). This suggests that other strategies are needed in addition to advocating for curriculum reform to have an impact on teaching for peace. Paulson referred to research which suggested that “students and teachers [in post-conflict situations] take advantage of small openings for change, and where possible, allow space for ‘dangerous memories’ to disturb taken-for-granted emotions and present identity as something other than static and essentialized” (Paulson, 2015, p. 24). Teachers need theoretical tools and skills through which they can critically examine the narratives presented in both syllabi and memory culture, since these narratives shape their own perceptions and thinking. Paulson (2015) highlighted the need for more research on teacher education that could in turn contribute to furthering education for reconciliation and peace. Our aim in this article is to respond to this need for a focus on teacher education.

Syllabi result from political processes that vary between different state formations and political systems. The common denominator is that syllabi express values that the state sees as desirable for the citizenry. Syllabi are written for different audiences. Actors within the education system, such as teachers, school leaders and teacher educators, are obvious audiences. However, actors beyond the national education system should also be considered as audiences of the history syllabi. Central policy documents are under close scrutiny by the global community providing development support following a national disaster. The RPF began communicating their version of history to international audiences in July 1994 (Jefremovas, 1997; Pottier, 2002). The history syllabus of Rwanda could serve both as proof of the government’s will to democratise and safeguard human rights, as well as serving the interest of the RPF to establish a narrative about the genocide which legitimises their power.

Furthermore, syllabi content never translate directly into classroom teaching and learning; on the contrary, teachers interpret this content. According to hermeneutic theory, interpretation involves the preconceptions of the interpreters. Teachers are not neutral in this process (Gundem, 2011). Following critical didactical philosophy, we contend that the planning and practising of education involves decision-making about goals and content, consideration of individual and sociocultural conditions for learning as well as possible consequences of teaching of the particular content. This understanding involves critique of norms and ideology found in syllabi (Gundem, 2011). Crucial to a critical theoretical perspective on didactics is foregrounding the question “Why?” in addition to the questions “What?” and “How?”, when studying the content of education (Gundem, 2011).

For these reasons, we argue that teacher educators can contribute to a more democratic education by including narrative and critical perspectives in their work with student teachers in the field of history education and other subjects which involve narratives about the nation's past and present. We find the study of the narrative structures of History syllabi to be an exemplary case, one that has potentially important implications not just for the Rwandan public, but beyond, to other national contexts. The lesson we take from this case is the importance of teacher education based in educational research and research in the academic disciplines, which are the bases of school subjects. This is a prerequisite for developing teacher professionalism, which can safeguard the goals of education for the good of humanity in the face of changing political circumstances (see Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Based on the review of literature and the theoretical perspectives on syllabi and teacher professionalism outlined above, our contribution is to view contradictions in the syllabus as possible openings for change, which teachers might utilise in their practice.

Two research questions guided the thematic analysis of the syllabi: How are relations between Hutus and Tutsis portrayed in recent History syllabi in post-genocide Rwanda, and how may the narrative about these relations affect efforts towards educating for peace? We interpret the goals of “unity”, “reconciliation” and “patriotism” stated in the syllabi to be elements of an education contributing to peace. In the next section, we connect post genocide education for peace to Lemkin's definition of holocaust (Lemkin, 1933). The study was based on a content analysis of four History syllabi for Ordinary and Advanced Levels published by the Rwanda Education Board between 2008 and 2015. The documents are electronically available in the public domain of the Rwanda Education Board (2013). We discuss our findings in light of possibilities for teacher education to promote change even when confronted with syllabi designed to conserve the power of the ruling regimes.

Our epistemological stance separates questions and insights about the past—history—from the actual past (Ammert, 2013; Körber, 2014). Accordingly, history education is seen as the critical reading of narratives about the past, the retrieval of insights about past events and developing historical consciousness (Körber, 2014). Historical consciousness is defined as follows: “When an individual experiences mutual signification and connection with an interpretation of the past, the understanding of the present and the perspective on the future, she has a historical consciousness” (Ammert, 2013, p. 8). Accordingly, our goal is not to criticise nor seek to replace the current grand narrative found in the syllabi of Rwanda, but rather to critically examine the existing narrative as embedded in struggles over political power and to use this critique to open possibilities for teaching for change. To become historically competent and less susceptible to political propaganda means being able to recognise politicised uses of the past and to acknowledge interpretations of historical events from multiple perspectives. This approach to history education aims to achieve social integration through multiperspectivity rather than via adherence to one dominant narrative by all. The capability to acknowledge different experiences and understandings of the past without denying past atrocities (Körber, 2014) is conducive to the second of the approaches to history teaching, which seek to contribute to peaceful development in post-conflict situations listed by Paulson (2015). We will return to this in more detail below.

### **1.1. History education in post-conflict Rwanda**

In the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, during which the Rwandan army, Hutu militias and Hutu civilians killed more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus within a span of just three months (Chakravarty, 2005, p. 133), the Rwandan authorities imposed a moratorium on the teaching of history, citing fears of another genocide (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; King, 2014; Paulson, 2015). This moratorium has been of particular concern to scholars studying Rwanda's post-genocide history education. One concern, among others, revolves around the fact that the vacuum created during the moratorium has enabled the inculcation of a politicised history, harnessed by those in power, to promote values amenable to their own ethnocentric perspective. Although the government did introduce a primary-level Guide to Civic Education in 2004 with funding from UNICEF (King, 2014), a full-fledged History syllabus was not implemented for another four years.

The first official History syllabus was introduced in 2008, roughly 14 years after the genocide. Sundaram (2016, p. 86) stated, “History, particularly, of the time of the genocide, was so vital to the president’s repression that for many years it was not taught by schoolteachers but by soldiers.” Some have argued that the current government has exploited the moratorium to disseminate a univocal, homogenising narrative of the genocide among the population (Hilker, 2011; Hodgkin, 2006; King, 2014). As Hodgkin (2006, p. 204) observed, “A ‘politically correct’ historical narrative has emerged shaped by government rhetoric surrounding the National Unity and Reconciliation project”. Paulson (2015) highlighted the conundrum that the moratorium has posed:

Research highlights how young people develop (often partisan) narratives and identification with regard to recent conflict, despite its formal absence from the school curriculum. History education that deals explicitly with conflict might play a role in mediating this process by engaging with controversial material, promoting discussion, and giving students the skills to interpret and contextualize their encounters with the violent past outside the classroom. (p. 26)

The antecedent to the 1994 genocide was a civil war that broke out in October 1990, when the Tutsi-led Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda from Uganda. According to Eramian (2017, p. 54), “In the ensuing power struggle, Hutu extremists in the Habyarimana government painted all Rwandan Tutsi as RPF collaborators and manipulated ethnic difference to mobilize the 1994 massacres”. In seeking an explanation on how local people were recruited into partaking in such extreme violence, Fuji (2008) argued that ethnicity was but one factor:

Leaders used family ties to target male relatives for recruitment into the killing groups, which were responsible for carrying out the genocide. Ties among members of the killing groups helped to initiate reluctant or hesitant members into committing violence with the group. Finally, ties of friendship attenuated murderous actions, leading killers to help save Tutsi in specific contexts. (p. 568)

Belgium introduced ID cards in 1933–1934 that divided Rwandans into two ethnic camps—Hutus and Tutsis. By this time, racist colonial policies had already deemed Tutsis to be more “European” and “nobler” through a pseudoscience that measured cranial and nasal protuberances, paralleling Nazi ideologies that precipitated the Holocaust (Moghalu, 2005, p. 11).<sup>1</sup> Narratives of past violence are often shaped by current political conditions. According to Fuji (2008, p. 577), “This was certainly the case in Rwanda, where the RPF-led government was intent on promoting a view of the genocide and war that contained no mention of RPF war crimes and thus no recognition of those who suffered at the hands of the RPF”. Hence, assigning all blame to ethnic divisions distorts the more complex picture that emerged through, for instance, Fuji’s (2008) empirical studies in Rwanda. Guichaoua (2015, p. 11) argued that the Rwandan genocide can be traced to a “legacy of antagonisms” which had inculcated deep forebodings and anticipatory violence—a “kill or be killed” mentality. Politicians at the time tapped into this legacy of antagonisms to engineer slaughter on a massive scale.

Other scholars, e.g. Ingelaere (2014), have expressed concern about the current government’s presence in every sphere of society—a “state overreach” (p. 225). In speaking about this high degree of state presence and control in the lives of Rwandans, Ingelaere (2014, p. 225) asked the question: “at what price is state building and development justified and legitimate? Indeed, in the Rwandan case, the question is primarily not how to overcome a ‘distant state’ but how to distance the state from society to avoid overreach”. Similar concerns were addressed in this study, which explored the teaching of History in Rwanda. One may ask, can history be critically discussed if speaking off-script is illegal and subject to job loss, fines and jail?

“Narratives about the past often pay tribute to ancestors, heroes and victims” (de Baets, 2009, p. 26); however, such tribute is frequently (and suspiciously) conflated with the ethnicity of the ruling class to the exclusion of other ethnicities living in a given country or society. In a similar vein,

such narratives may seek to “create acceptable ideological and political versions of the past” (2009, p. 28). That said, researchers have not concluded that ethnic hatred or “tribalism” was the sole cause of the Rwandan genocide. Rather, political power struggles have been given more weight (Chakravarty, 2005; Fuji, 2008; Guichoua, 2015; Ingelaere, 2014). It is important to note that a one-dimensional causal explanation of the genocide may lead to a call for a one-dimensional preventative measure for the future. Negating the existence of ethnic tensions as a social phenomenon and seeking to reconstruct citizenship without ethnic identity could effectively divert attention from other dimensions of social justice, such as economic redistribution and political representation.

According to Paulson (2015), the teaching of history in post-conflict situations often follows one of three patterns: (a) one that shifts from indoctrination to inspiration with a view towards engaging students; (b) one that valorises enquiry and seeks to instil the disciplinary skills of historians such that students become comfortable with contradictory sources, alternative perspectives and the constructed nature of historical knowledge; and (c) a “denationalized” version whereby history is subsumed under social science or a similar overarching theme, and students become part of an expanded notion of community. Paulson favoured the second approach, which is commensurate with teaching for the capability to acknowledge different experiences and understandings of the past without denying past atrocities (Körber, 2014).

### 1.2. Genocide studies and history education

In 1933, Raphael Lemkin, the so-called “father of genocide studies”, employed the term *barbarity* to describe what would later be termed *genocide*. His definition has often been invoked as an argument for a more rounded consideration of the machinations that crystallise into genocide, as well as for crafting sustainable peace education:

First and foremost, acts of extermination directed against ethnic, religious or social collectivities whatever the motive (political, religious, etc.); for example massacres, pogroms, actions undertaken to ruin the economic existence of the members of a collective, etc. (Lemkin, 1933, p. 5)

Lemkin took a more wide-ranging approach than that which was later codified in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UN, 1948). While the latter narrowly focused on “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such”, Lemkin’s (1933) expansive definition drew attention away from a wholly clinical preoccupation with the physical. As Shaw (2007, p. 36) noted, “Seeing genocide in this way enables us to see it as a destructive process and escape from the trap of defining it by physical destruction alone”. Following Lemkin, the current, Tutsi-dominated government of Rwanda, by virtue of its recent and traumatic history, would do well to pay close attention to the impact (intentionality aside) its policies have on “non-physical” dimensions of social life—i.e., Lemkin’s ethnic, religious, political and economic spheres, particularly as perceived by the Hutu majority, which comprise 85% of the Rwandan population.

In addition to stressing the need for educators engaged in peace education in a post-conflict milieu such as Rwanda to adopt the holistic view sketched above, scholars of genocide studies equally discourage the singling out of certain groups as “victims” and “survivors”, since doing so disinvests other groups of the right to use these designations. Here, it should be noted that the machete-wielding, paramilitary Hutu *interahamwe* were primarily responsible for the genocide against the Tutsis in 1994 (Meredith, 2005). However, as scholars of genocide studies have argued, the heterogeneity of suffering, however peripheral, should also be emphasised in the national narrative in order to promote sustainable peace education. Victims are often understood essentially as “groups” targeted for “destruction”—yet it is clear that victimised populations are often socially heterogeneous and individually affected by group targeting in complex ways (Shaw, 2007, p. 96). Furthermore, as Shaw claimed:



Even when there is one main group target, people who do not belong to it are targeted for adjacent reasons, as in Rwanda where Hutu opposition politicians were killed before the mass attack on the Tutsi population, or in Bosnia where cosmopolitan urban centres were attacked at the same time as Muslims. (2007, p. 115)

To summarise, the literature review on history education and genocide studies advocates for a holistic and narrative approach to history education. The study of the generation of narratives about the past and historical remembrance must be a central focus of history education.

Furthermore, scholars have called for an approach to the study of history that is both disciplined and enquiry-based; an approach that seeks to approximate the facts and show “how things were” (Lemkin, 1933). Such a holistic approach would employ a multifaceted lens through which the role of ethnic relations, religion, politics and economics could be queried and essentialised understandings of ethnic identity challenged.

## 2. Methodology

The Rwanda Education Board website includes four publicly available History syllabi: Ordinary Level (2008, 2015) and Advanced Level (2010, 2015). All four documents, comprising a total of 315 pages, were explored in this study via a content analysis method. Because content analysis generates predetermined categories and coding patterns that are both systematic and replicable, it is considered a research method (Bryman, 2004, p. 181). Aside from being an unobtrusive technique, content analysis can “describe the *relative frequency* and importance of certain topics as well as to evaluate bias, prejudice or propaganda in print materials” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Krippendorff (2004) suggested that content analysis can be usefully divided into four classes: attributions, social relationships, public behaviours and institutional realities. These classes served to guide our study. Although the examined syllabi refrain from explicitly mentioning ethnic affiliations, except in the context of the 1994 genocide, the issue of attributions and social relationships in apportioning blame or absolution is still manifest, as the analysis showed.

A thematic unit of analysis, whereby texts are categorised into themes and thematic combinations (Robson, 1993), was deemed most appropriate for this study since the History syllabi were arranged in thematic units chronologically. Only themes pertinent to the research question were selected for content analysis. Commensurate with the nature of this study, a thematic approach requires a more interpretative stance (Bryman, 2004, p. 188). For instance, the History syllabus for Ordinary Level (2008), Chapter 3, is entitled, “Other Major Important Civilizations” (page 24). Given that the Cushitic, Carthaginian and Nok (southern Nigeria) civilisations mentioned in this chapter bore no relevance to the research question, this information was omitted. The codes were derived responsively rather than preordinately from the data to enhance fidelity to the text, after which the codes were collected into nodes or categories. Content analysis makes an amalgamation of quantitative and qualitative methods possible. Berelson’s (1952) definition highlights the manifest or denotative content (simple aggregation of particular features and text regularities, for example), while Holsti (1969) drew attention to the latent or “hidden” context. The latter’s focus was more aligned with this study’s aim of treating data from official sources as social products (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 129).

The educational documents were read in light of the literature on Rwanda. It was clear that there were some formulations that contradicted scholarly consensus on Rwandan history—what Payne & Payne (2004, p. 52) refer to as the procedure of “positive or negative evaluation” in content analysis. The first was the issue of the exploitative feudal arrangements *ubuhake* and *uburetwa*. These were portrayed in positive light while the literature (see findings section) considers these oppressive clientele systems that benefitted a few elites who were Tutsis in the main. A word search was done to locate every reference to these terms. Using the qualitative research software, Nvivo, a node was created with the label: *ubuhake* and *uburetwa*. Each syllabus which featured these terms was assigned a new node (e.g. *ubuhake* and *uburetwa* OL08 i.e. Ordinary Level 2008 etc.). The overarching theme, elicited from a comparison of these nodes, was “Socio-economic conditions in pre-colonial

Rwanda". In this "parent node", similarities and uniqueness of the earlier nodes were considered in light of the literature review and the authors' reflections. The "parent node", hence, gives expression to the emerging discursive themes that were iteratively considered in light of the research question.

In a similar vein, repeated readings of the four syllabus documents revealed what was perceived as value-laden statements about former administrations and the current one. Nodes were labelled "positive", "negative" or "descriptive" depending on the disposition enjoined in the sentences about the former and current governments. The distinctions were made based either on individual words that negatively, positively or descriptively foregrounded the subject—e.g. *bad* actions of power of Juvenal Habyarimana (Ordinary Level 2008, p. 71) or on the level of sentential interpretation—e.g. *Identify the objectives and achievements of the government of National Unity* (p. 59). The above aligns with Bryman (2004, p.189) who states, "Another way in which dispositions may be revealed in content analysis is through the coding of ideologies, beliefs or principles". The nodes were compared in light of the literature with the second theme (parent node) labelled "Portrayals of the Second Republic (1973–1994) and the government after 1994". This theme was deemed commensurate with the nature of the research question which is concerned with the historic portrayal of relations between the Hutus and Tutsis with a view towards reconciliation in a "post ethnic" Rwanda.

As with other research methods, content analysis is susceptible to certain limitations, including subjectivity in interpretive approaches and theoretical underpinnings (Bryman, 2004). To enhance inter-coder reliability (Bryman, 2004, p. 195), the codes and nodes were compared with those produced by another coder familiar with Rwandan education, while the second limitation was mitigated by reference to the wide corpus of literature delineated earlier.

### 3. Findings and analysis

Findings from the four History syllabi issued by the Ministry of Education, National Curriculum Development Centre, Kigali, Rwanda, are presented below. The four syllabi were compared chronologically with the following codes: Ordinary Level 2008 (OL08), Advanced Level 2010 (AL10), Ordinary Level 2015 (OL15) and Advanced Level 2015 (AL15). Some sections of the documents suffered from errors ranging from misspellings to poor syntax. Citations have been reproduced verbatim without rectifications.

#### (1) *Socio-economic conditions in pre-colonial Rwanda*

With the help of different documents read an extract of text concerning *ubuhake*, *Ubukonde* and *uburetwa* and help the learners to understand the importance of two institutions in socio- politico and economic relations among the Rwandese (OL08, p. 20).

From different systems of clientelism, the teacher should help learners to understand importance of political, social relations in ancient Rwandan society (AL10, p. 21).

Appreciate the importance of social, political, cultural and economic organisation of pre-colonial Rwanda... socio-political and economic dependence (*ubuhake*, *ubukonde*, *uburetwa*) ... Value the socio- political and economic dependence of pre-colonial Rwanda dependence (OL15).

Explain the concepts of the home-grown solutions and self-reliance: *Girinka*, *Ubudehe*, *Akarima k'igikoni*, *Kuremera*, *Umuganda*, *Agaciro*, *Imihigo*, *Itorero*, Community policing. Identify the contribution of the home-grown solutions towards a good governance, self-reliance and dignity. Identify the challenges encountered during the implementation of the home-grown solutions (AL15 p. 66, 67).

*Ubuhake* refers to the feudally based social structure present in Rwanda and Burundi from the fifteenth century to 1958. The pastoralist, minority Tutsis utilised cattle distribution to develop a clientele system in which the mainly agriculturalist Hutus became economically and socially subservient, a system which was augmented by an entrenched Tutsi monarchy. In addition, the Tutsi monarchs institutionalised a land distribution system called *uburetwa* which, according to scholars, was a form of unpaid, *corvée* labour, disproportionately disadvantaging Hutus in a skewed, asymmetric patron–client relationship (King, 2014; p. 39; Longman, 2010; Newbury, 1980). The Tutsi monarchs seized control of vast tracts of land through the practice known as *igikingi*. Rebellious Hutus in the north, however, maintained their autonomy. Vansina’s description of *uburetwa* is scathing:

From now on two out of every four days of the Rwandan week had to be set aside for services to the chief. The loss of about half of their available time was a very heavy burden for most taxpayers...The chiefs, especially the chief’s wife, takes what he wants; the *nyamunyu* (cooking bananas), yams, etc., that are ripe and the *muhutu* does as he is asked so as to not lose his field. The imposition of *uburetwa* on farmers and not on herders was the straw that broke the camel’s back. (2005, p. 134)

Of concern here is the fact that three of the four History syllabi employ language that portrays *ubuhake* and *uburetwa* favourably. OL08 and AL10 contain the imperative “help the learners to understand the importance of”, while OL15 and AL15 explicitly use “appreciate” and “value”, respectively. Significantly, the last document, AL15, makes no mention whatsoever of *ubuhake* and the related oppressive systems. Rather, it highlights voluntary, community-based self-help initiatives, such as *ubuhede*, in fighting poverty. This initiative, launched by the RPF and President Kagame in 2001 as a pilot project in the Butare District, and later rolled out on a national scale in 2004, encourages the participation of communities in their own development. *Ubuhede* has been lauded by the international community (Mupenzi, 2007, p. 20).

The privileging of exploitative systems, such as *ubuhake* and *uburetwa*, obviously raises serious questions with respect to peace education in post-genocide Rwanda. Commensurate with de Baets (2009), it appears that the architects of the History syllabi implemented in the last eight years have elected to rely on a social memory guided by instrumental motives. In this style of history teaching, the subject is perceived as an arena in which tribute is paid to certain “ancestors, heroes and victims which may suspiciously conflate with the ethnicity of the ruling class to the exclusion of other ethnicities represented in that country or society. In a similar vein, they may seek to create acceptable ideological and political versions of the past” (de Baets, 2009, p. 28). The sympathetic references to *ubuhake* and related exploitative socio-economic arrangements can only kindle resentment among the majority Hutus. Speaking about the *ubuhake* and *uburetwa* systems, Vansina (2005, p. 134) wrote, “Very soon it provoked a rift that was to divide society from top to bottom into two hierarchized and opposed social categories, henceforth labelled ‘Tutsi’ and ‘Hutu’”.

To say, however, that the Tutsis, as an ethnic category, were always dominant and oppressive towards Hutus would be incorrect. The Rwandan language, Kinyarwanda, has no corresponding term for race or ethnicity as understood in the west. The latter suggests that the pre-colonial designations, Hutu and Tutsi, were not envisioned in contemporary ethnic/racial categories. As such, any conscious exercise of power informed by notions of ethnic superiority or entitlement was yet to be developed. As Vidal (1973, p. 2–4) stated, “Thousands of wealthy Hutu were never reclassified as Tutsi, and thousands of lower-class Tutsi struggled to eke out a living far from the luxuries of the royal court”. Nevertheless, Barton (2013), while acknowledging a general sense of societal stability and cultural-linguistic homogeneity in pre-colonial Rwanda, also argued:

It is also acknowledged, however, that there were various levels of social distinction between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi. Especially by the late nineteenth century, the distinct identities developed within a highly organized feudal hierarchy in which the Tutsi typically dominated positions of high authority. (p. 7)



Barton (2013) argued that colonial powers exploited the Tutsi monarchy as an apparatus for colonial power and racialised the Tutsi-Hutu distinction into the polarised opposition that later led to genocide.

### **(3) *Portrayals of the Second Republic (1973–1994) and the government after 1994***

This section juxtaposes syllabi portrayals of the Second Republic with that of the Rwandan government since 1994, beginning with the National Unity government. The text reproduced below for analysis was deemed to represent the spectrum of text featuring the “content”, “skills”, “attitudes” and “learning activities” aspects stipulated in the syllabi. To facilitate analysis, codes 01, 02, etc. were assigned to Ordinary Levels, while codes A1, A2, etc. were assigned to Advanced Levels.

#### *Ordinary Level 2008 (Second Republic 1973–1994)*

- (O1) Help learners to be able to compare the phenomenon between Fascism and Nazism and what took place in Rwanda. (Ref.: The Second Republic) (p. 59).
- (O2) The cult of personality. The monopolization. The question of refugees (pp. 66, 67).
- (O3) Organize a debate on the policy of ethnic and regional balance and criticize with learners to show that the base of policy was erroneous with incompetence and it led to failure (p. 68).
- (O4) Explain the bad actions of power of Juvenal Habyarimana put into action of the Arusha peace Accord (p. 71).

#### *Ordinary Level 2008 (government since 1994)*

- (O5) Efforts of the Government of National Unity—The Unity and Reconciliation—The Economic, Political, and Socio-Cultural Realisations (Successes) (p. 72).
- (O6) Explain the effort of the government in rehabilitating the Country (p. 73).

#### *Ordinary Level 2015 (Second Republic)*

- (O7) Evaluate the causes, course, and consequences of liberation war in Rwanda (1990–1994) and indicate the great need for the people to return from exile.

#### *Ordinary Level 2015 (government since 1994)*

- (O8) Appreciate strategies set up by Rwandan government to achieve national independence (p. 72).
- (O9) Describe how Rwandan society has been re-built after genocide against the Tutsi (p. 59).

#### *Advanced Level 2010 (Second Republic)*

- (A1) The Coup of 1973. Massacres and exclusion as ethnical character. Elimination of oppositions. Institutionalization of the dictatorship—Creation of MNRD 1975. 1978 constitution (p. 56).
- (A2) Increase of refugee problems. Social and political discrimination. Dictatorship (Akazu). Economic crises of 1980. Ethnic discrimination in all domain: political, economic and social:—Quota system in schools, employment, ethnic, regional—Exclusion in other sectors. Regional imbalances. Rwandan Unity (Massacres of Tutsi) (p. 57).

#### *Advanced Level 2010 (government since 1994)*

- (A3) Identify the objectives and achievements of the government of National Unity (p. 59).

#### *Advanced Level 2015 (Second Republic)*

- (A4) Appreciate the factors for the disintegration of the 1st and 2nd Republics of Rwanda, and learn lessons from bad leadership (p. 34).

- (A5) The learners read a range of materials and use internet, media, etc. to research on the achievements and the failures of the 1st and the 2nd Republics. Present findings as an essay (p. 34).

*Advanced Level 2015 (government since 1994)*

- (A6) The learners do research using relevant documents and internet to find about the achievements and the challenges of the Rwandan Government after 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Thereafter, make a presentation in the class followed by questions and answers (p. 51).

The Ordinary Levels syllabi clearly demonstrate a strong dislike of the Second Republic, which is relatively toned down in the Advanced Levels syllabi. Given that more students in the Global South access Ordinary Levels (lower secondary) compared to Advanced Levels (upper secondary), what Ernest Gellner (1983, p. 34) called “the monopoly of legitimate education” is salient in efforts towards peace education in post-conflict countries such as Rwanda, where 43% of the population is below 14 years of age (King, 2014). Of note is the deliberate invitation to compare the Second Republic to the totalitarian regimes of “Fascism” and “Nazism” (O1). Strategies of nominalisation (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991), such as “monopolization” (O2), “incompetence” (O3), “failure” (O3), “massacres”, “exclusion” and “elimination” (A1), and “elimination”, “dictatorship” and “exclusion” (A2) have the effect of delegitimising the Second Republic and putting it beyond the pale. Although the Hutus are not named, a tactic called “agency deletion” (Fairclough, 1995), tribal discourse is clearly at play. A4 states, *Appreciate the factors for the disintegration of the 1st and 2nd Republics of Rwanda, and learn lessons from bad leadership* (p. 34). Thus, in one statement, Hutu governance since independence is demonised and dismissed as *bad leadership* (A4).

In contrast, the Tutsi-dominated government since 1994 is portrayed in positive terms; again, however, without specifically mentioning its ethnic affiliation (i.e., agency deletion). This apparent ban on explicitly making references to ethnic affiliation rings hollow, however, when the ideological discourse clearly exposes ethnic bias. The nominalisations employed clearly put pressure on teachers to think in a predetermined manner: “efforts”, “unity”, “reconciliation”, “economic, political, and socio-cultural realisations”, “successes” (O5) and the ongoing “rehabilitating the country” (O6). Our analysis is limited to those syllabus documents based on which the inferences in this paper were drawn. This is by no means intended to suggest that Habyarimana’s regime was just or that the Hutus were not actively co-opted in their efforts towards reconciliation in the aftermath of the genocide. The RPF should be commended for establishing some semblance of order in the aftermath of the genocide, while western powers, such as the US, watched passively from afar, or, as with France, were accused of complicity. The RPF demonstrated a commitment to power sharing commensurate with the terms of the Arusha Accords. That the militarily triumphant Tutsi-led RPF elected to install a Hutu President, Pasteur Bizimungu, and a Hutu Prime Minister, Faustin Twagiramunga, speaks volumes about their desire to forge a united Rwanda. Hutus who championed the cause of justice for all Rwandans should also be given due recognition. One such individual is the former Hutu Minister of Education, Agathe Uwilingiyimana. Upon assuming office in 1991, she abolished the discriminatory quota system—a product of Habyarimana’s regime—in favour of a merit-based system. The quota system, according to Verwimp (2014), forced Tutsis to procure Hutu identity cards in order to attend school. Uwilingiyimana paid for her efforts with her life in the early days of the genocide. Meanwhile, the military dictatorship of Habyarimana would often see a consistent return of 98% in the polls, as opponents were silenced and Hutus were given better opportunities. Verwimp argued that Habyarimana’s fondness for the peasant life and accompanying virtues was laced with contempt for the “aristocratic” Tutsi.

Furthermore, a careful perusal of the syllabi also yields several references to the plight of “refugees” during the First and Second Republics. “The question of refugees” (O1), “the great need for the people to return from exile” (O7) and the “increase of refugee problems” (A2) reflect the painful experiences of several thousand Tutsis who fled Rwanda during the exile

period. President Kagame himself went into exile in neighbouring Uganda in 1962. According to Guest, 2013, p. 115), “The Tutsis did not like living under Habyarimana’s dictatorship, and by 1990 about 600,000 or 700,000 of them had fled the country”. Sundaram’s (2016, p. 87) interviewees accused Kagame of elevating his ordeal during exile above that of the genocide:

He insulted the survivors in private with phrases like “your genocide”, though he too was Tutsi. “We tell the President that we are sensitive to such words, but he and his people keep using them”. The president told survivors that they had not suffered, as he had, for years in exile. “He compares his childhood humiliation to the genocide”.

Regrettably, it is difficult to locate any of the patterns of teaching history reviewed in the literature. On the contrary, it appears that the order of Paulson’s (2015) first pattern is reversed in the Rwandan syllabi—a shift from inspiration to indoctrination. This is problematic insofar as the issue of creating space for dissident views is concerned. As Tosh (2006) reminds us, democracy does not limit the range of opinions about these historical facts nor the public and critical scrutiny of these opinions in an open debate. While one cannot dismiss the ordeals of exile, Hutus coerced into accepting and promulgating only one version of history—a version that celebrates the “victimhood” and “triumph” of Tutsis in Rwandan history—flirts dangerously with recreating the conditions for another conflict in the future. King’s (2014) critique is apposite in this regard:

The Kagame government simultaneously espouses that reconciliation is underway and that ethnicity no longer matters, while it also bases its rule on the notion that Tutsi status as victims of the genocide grant it the moral high ground and right to make decisions. The hypocrisy of maintaining both positions is evident in the feelings of deprivation engendered by such practices as a singular narrative of Hutu perpetrators as Tutsi victims and the distribution of educational scholarships. (p. 143)

Rather than conveying well-grounded knowledge about the past, the History syllabi appear to suppress the spirit of enquiry as well as alternative perspectives (Paulson, 2015), favouring instead a history that elevates one ethnic group above others. To the above misgivings, one can add the issue of so-called “critical thinking” in the History syllabi. The invitation to be “critical” in all its inflections can only be considered a red herring given the experiences of various researchers and journalists in Rwanda. The contradiction is evident in the sentence: *Organize a debate on the policy of ethnic and regional balance and criticize with learners to show that the base of policy was erroneous with incompetence and it led to failure* (O3). That the outcome of the so-called “debate” has already been prescribed as evidenced in the sentence: *to show the base of policy was erroneous...*

What would happen, for example, if students were to discover that the government had consistently disengaged from calls to cooperate in investigations of alleged war crimes committed by RPA soldiers (Marchak, 2008, p. 182), or that the World Bank was forced to destroy data contradicting President Kagame’s claim that he had improved life (Sundaram, 2016, p. 31), or that the BBC Radio Service in the local Kinyarwanda language had been indefinitely suspended in the wake of a row over a film that had questioned official accounts of the genocide (The Guardian, 2015)? Would the government and history teachers in Rwanda accommodate such “critical thinking”, which the syllabi “encourage”? What are the limits of academic freedom and scholarly independence in Kagame’s Rwanda? Marchak (2008, p. 74) warned about this slide into pre-genocide bigotry a decade ago:

But the (Tutsi-dominated) government cannot recognize that it is setting up the same problems that created Hutu distrust under the Belgian regime. It insists that any Hutus who object or criticize are engaging in “divisionism” and must be jailed or otherwise punished. The Hutu remain the underclass; yet again they are uneducated and discriminated against.

### (3) *The history syllabi and the 1994 genocide*

- To live with the world without ethnic, religious distinction or other forms of discrimination and of exclusion that led to genocide of Tutsi in 1994 (OL08, p. 6).
- Show the role of negation and revisionism in the fight against Genocide ideology (OL08, p. 72).
- Negationism and persistence of the genocide ideology (OL10, p. 59).
- To be able to describe the causes and the course of genocide against the Tutsi (Planning, execution and how genocide was stopped) (OL16, p. 40).
- Appreciate the role played by RPF/RPA to stop genocide against the Tutsi (OL16, p. 40).
- Read a range of materials including textbooks, Internet, media (videos, films and newspaper), to be able to describe the causes of genocide in an essay (OL16, p. 40).
- (Under “Other needed materials”) Testimonies of the Genocide survivors and perpetrators (AL16, p. 13).
- The learner should be able to analyse different forms of genocide denial and ideology in Rwanda and abroad (AL16, p. 35).
- Books on Rwanda: Inside the Hotel Rwanda, Confronting genocide in Rwanda; dehumanisation, denial and the strategies for prevention (AL16, p. 13).

Close to 60 references contain variations of the phrase “genocide against the Tutsi” or “Tutsi genocide”. In addition, the section on the genocide is regularly punctuated with imperatives against “genocide denial”. The sentences above are merely some samples of the most common formulations, which would be too many to enumerate. Of significance is the call to *Appreciate the role played by RPF/RPA to stop genocide against the Tutsi* (OL16, p. 40). The latter sentence recalls Shaw’s (2007) argument about the need to recognise the heterogeneity of suffering, however peripheral. The genocide narrative as portrayed in the syllabi evinces a feverish obsession with policing the boundaries of what can be said about the genocide. Shaw reminded us that “Hutu opposition politicians were killed before the mass attack on the Tutsi population” (Shaw, 2007, p. 115). Despite talk of listening to the *Testimonies of the Genocide survivors and perpetrators* (AL16, p. 13), Hutu survivors’ testimonies are silenced.

Undoubtedly, the ferocity and speed with which close to 800,000 Tutsis were killed in roughly six weeks cannot be denied. Guest, 2013, p. 112) wrote, “To be chopped or bludgeoned to death takes time; some Tutsis paid to be shot instead...This was a rate of slaughter roughly five times that of the Nazi extermination camps”. This study, however, was more concerned with the role of history teaching in formal schooling and its potential to foster sustainable peace in a post-conflict situation. How does the imperative to *Appreciate the role of the RPF/RPA to stop genocide against the Tutsi* contribute to harmonious relations when the RPF themselves are implicated in crimes against the Hutus? Speaking of Kagame’s RPF, Guest, 2013, p. 119) stated, “But it is ruthless. During the war against the *génocidaires* in Rwanda, the RPF killed between 25,000 and 45,000 people. When the *génocidaires* regrouped in Congo, Mr Kagame’s men invaded, twice, and with their local allies killed perhaps 200,000 refugees”.

Finally, it was rare for an official History syllabus to overtly recommend particular books that supported the ruling party’s views given the procedural, contested nature of historical enquiry. The syllabus for Advanced Levels 2016 states: *Books on Rwanda: Inside the Hotel Rwanda, Confronting genocide in Rwanda; dehumanisation, denial and the strategies for prevention* (AL16, p. 13). The book recommended by the syllabus, *Inside the Hotel Rwanda*, written in 2014 and endorsed by, among others, Bernard Makuza, Vice President of the Rwandan Senate, a former prime minister, and a former ambassador to Germany and Burundi, acts as a “corrective” to the role played by Paul Rusesabagina, the famed hotel manager and protagonist of the film, *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), who is currently “accused by the Rwandan prosecutor general of being a genocide negationist and funding the terrorist group Democratic Forces for

the Liberation of Rwanda *The Guardian* (2010)". According to *The Guardian* (2010), Rusesabagina, who is of mixed Hutu-Tutsi lineage, "has repeatedly warned that the concentration of power among the ruling elite Tutsis—the ethnic group targeted by Hutu militias during the genocide—meant that another genocide was likely".

Education in Rwanda has also been impacted by the decision in 2008 to make English the official language of instruction instead of French. Several French-speaking teachers were replaced with English-speaking teachers from neighbouring countries who uncritically accepted the government discourse. Anglophone writer Hannan (2013, p. 26) interpreted Rwanda's decision to replace French with English and to join the British commonwealth as evidence of "its commitment to liberty", keeping readers in the dark about the political and epistemological consequences of the linguistic policy shift. English is the language of Rwanda's elite, especially the leadership of the RPF, including Paul Kagame and other Tutsi returnees from Anglophone countries (Isabela, 2012).

After securing power, the RPF moved swiftly to control what *could* be said about the country's history, not just of the genocide but also events since precolonial times. Clearly, one advantage this confers is the power to divert attention from RPF's own role in the genocide and focus instead on aspects that portray the party more favourably. Seen through such a lens, which Jefremovas (1997, p. 2) called "a series of fictions ... fictions of ethnicity, ethnography and history in Rwanda", the current History syllabus is but the latest incarnation in a series of fictions. The RPF has two key motivations in crafting a particular version of history. The first is to sublimate its role in pursuing political power at the expense of Tutsi lives, framing itself instead as heroes for stopping the genocide. The second is to rewrite Rwandan precolonial and colonial history to serve its own reconstruction and reconciliation vision for society. If moral orientation and attitudes are vital attributes for critical thinking, as Mason (2009) argued, then there is indeed reason to be alarmed about history teaching in Rwanda.

Clearly, the way the terms *Hutu* and *Tutsi* have been employed historically has been contingent upon who was doing the "defining". Some have even challenged the consensus that the Catholic Church is to blame for ossifying these ethnic categories (Carney, 2012). What is less controversial, however, is the notion that the colonial legacy is one of rendering relations between these ethnic categories toxic through the construction of, among other narratives, fables such as the "Hamitic hypothesis" (Czekanowski, 1960; Sanders, 1969). This theory posits that the Tutsi are Hamites who are ethnically closer to Caucasians than the Hutus, whose physiology is more closely associated with the indigenous Bantu.

There is some sympathy for the view that the current government in Rwanda, in imposing a moratorium followed by a new History syllabus, is justifiably seeking to stabilise the otherwise oscillating narratives imposed by foreigners by crafting a new national narrative more conducive to peace. The argument can be summarised as follows: If narratives spun by foreigners about Rwandans in the past culminated in an event as horrendous as the genocide, then one of the government's first tasks is to develop another narrative, one that is indigenous and judicious and can serve as an arena for reconciliation rather than hostility. The complexity of the coexisting narratives about the Rwandan past, as well as the contradictions in the syllabi and the vested interests these contradictions serve, demand that teachers be knowledgeable about the functions of these narratives and competent in addressing their diversity in light of the goals of reconciliation, unity and critical thinking.

Scholars on Rwanda are sceptical about the peace-building efforts made since 1994 (King, 2014; Pottier, 2002; Waldorf, 2006). Waldorf (2006) highlighted the fact that *gacaca* courts have been forcefully imposed by the RPF. This has had two outcomes favourable to the RPF: (1) Since the onus was placed on the survivors to forgive, the RPF could avoid prosecution for war crimes; (2) the process assigned all blame to the Hutus, thereby legitimating the post-genocide government. These two observations resonate with our analysis of the History syllabus, where we have drawn attention to statements that clearly align with what Straus and Waldorf (2011) called the RPF's controversial plan



for the “New Rwanda”. In this New Rwanda, talk of ethnicity is proscribed, and the RPF are portrayed in messianic terms: *Appreciate the role played by RPF/RPA to stop genocide against the Tutsi* (OL16, p. 40).

#### 4. Conclusion of the thematic analysis of the syllabi

This study has explored four Rwandan government History syllabi for lower and upper secondary education levels between 2008 and 2015. The questions guiding the study were: How are relations between Hutus and Tutsis portrayed in recent History syllabi in post-genocide Rwanda, and how may the narrative about these relations affect efforts towards educating for peace? These questions interrogate narratives about identity and intergroup relations as well as how such narratives affect and are addressed in education.

The analysis showed how the official syllabi function as ideological documents, constructing an officially sanctioned narrative that privileges one ethnic group and justifies the dominant position of members of this group. It is widely accepted that the subject of history is particularly susceptible to distortions by autocrats seeking to inculcate values and understandings of history in line with government views in the minds of impressionable youth.

Three historical periods were analysed: the precolonial era, the Second Republic and statements about the genocide. It has been argued that a partisan, ethnocentric social memory, rather than the pursuit of facts based on sound historical knowledge, underpins the “rehabilitation” of oppressive precolonial feudal practices, such as *ubuhake* and *uburetwa*, which exploited Hutus. In addition, the content analysis revealed a systematic vilification of the Hutu-led Second Republic, which ended in 1994. One can detect a dualistic “Hutu-government bad vs. Tutsi-government good” rhetoric with agency deletion. Finally, the third section, which explored the genocide, unpacked a discourse with no opposition to that promulgated by the government. The History syllabi portray the Tutsi-dominated RPF/RPA in messianic terms, and teachers and students are urged to “appreciate” and “acknowledge” the party’s role in ending the genocide.

Our analysis shows that although ethnic identity is considered unpatriotic by the Rwandan authorities, one ethnic group has nonetheless emerged as dominant in the official narrative about the Rwandan past. Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy, and Longman (2011) pointed out that the history education introduced after the moratorium was built on the denial of the existence of different ethnic groups in Rwanda. Our analysis of the syllabi also shows that the pretence that ethnic difference does not exist as a social phenomenon in present-day Rwanda results only in the hegemony of the ruling group.

We found striking contradictions between the postulates that encourage critical thinking and both the content and working methods mandated by the syllabi. We conclude that the syllabi espouse historical epistemology as objective and conflate present-day narratives about the past with actual past events. The syllabi also state “unity”, “reconciliation”, “patriotism” and “critical thinking” as goals of education. Teaching according to the epistemology of the history syllabi would be contradictory to the multiperspectivity and historical consciousness needed for “unity”, “reconciliation”, “patriotism” and “critical thinking” and cannot, according to both the reviewed literature and our understanding, contribute to education for peace. Below we will discuss possible implications of this contradiction for teaching for peace in Rwanda and beyond.

#### 5. Discussion

Three factors affecting history teaching for peaceful development emerge from this study of research literature and syllabi texts. These are: (a) the contradictions in the syllabi between the biased narrative and the goals of critical thinking, reconciliation and unity accounted for above, (b) the observation that narratives about the past such as those found in the Rwandan syllabi are resistant to change and (c) that history teachers’ own historical consciousness and interpretations of the syllabi can be expected to influence their interpretation of the syllabi.

Given these obstacles, we suggest that teacher education may have an important role to play in countering such anti-democratic education policies.

Teachers need theoretical tools from the fields of history education and didactics to practice education for peace in the face of shifting political situations. We suggest that knowledge about historical consciousness, historical competencies and a critical hermeneutic perspective on didactics may provide such tools. When teacher education is research-based, it may educate teachers who have the competence to examine syllabi as well as their own and other's interpretations of history critically. Teachers are likely to encounter changing syllabi during the course of their careers. They need to develop the capacity to teach according to professional standards gleaned from research in order to maintain professional autonomy.

For example, being knowledgeable about different discourses on identity and ethnic relations will help teachers reflect on the strategy of denying ethnicity found in the Rwandan syllabi.

Recognising the social significance of inter-ethnic relations and students' and teachers' knowledge of such relations is necessary for developing a socially equitable history education. and see possibilities to connect across social groups along lines of common experience and interest.

A challenge in bringing about change in history education is that teachers themselves are socialised into the same narratives as their students and may have personal experiences with atrocities or oppression in the past. The nature of such narratives, as well as engagement with them, depends on how far apart they are in time from the actual experience. Teachers are likely to have emotional attachment to one particular version of past events.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge about the concepts of historical consciousness and historical competencies can help teachers reflect both on their own taken-for-granted emotions, dispositions and interpretations of the past as well as those of their students. When discussions about controversial topics start in the classroom, these concepts can help teachers see these discussions and differences in interpretations as useful learning opportunities for the development of historical consciousness and critical thinking rather than wrong or unacceptable knowledge about history.

Another challenge is that teacher education may not include ways of handling emotionally charged or controversial topics in the classroom. Teachers may thus choose to avoid such topics out of fear they may escalate out of control or due to pressure from parents. Theoretical tools needed to analyse the narratives contained in texts, such as syllabi and textbooks, as well as didactical tools to facilitate classroom discussions about emotionally charged topics need to be part of teacher education. Student teachers must learn about the fields of civics education, human rights education, peace education and history education, as both separate areas of knowledge development and as mutually supportive fields. They should learn about controversies in the field of history education regarding the use of historical knowledge for other purposes and the limitations of teaching about human rights in an ahistorical way, thereby erasing any intergroup conflicts in the past in the name of reconciliation and unity.

Freedman et al. (2011) concluded their study on the implementation of a history education that promotes critical thinking (following the moratorium on history teaching) by claiming that their approach might be at odds with both authoritarian regimes and nation building. Although we acknowledge the challenges involved in implementing critical thinking in schools under the auspices of an authoritarian government and without inflating the power of education to singularly bring about social justice and stability, we nevertheless contend that teacher education may be a suitable place to begin working towards change. Indeed, it is the responsibility of teacher educators to prepare teachers to recognise the political nature of syllabi documents and to make choices for their own teaching based on professional autonomy.

## Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

## Author details

Paul Thomas<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [hpaulsilas@hotmail.com](mailto:hpaulsilas@hotmail.com)

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1366-3781>

Kristin Skinstad van der Kooij<sup>2</sup>

E-mail: [Kristin.Van-der-Kooij@oslomet.no](mailto:Kristin.Van-der-Kooij@oslomet.no)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Educational Science, University of South-Eastern Norway, Drammen, Norway.

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Pedagogy and Social Science, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Elverum, Norway.

## Citation information

Cite this article as: The history syllabus in post-genocide Rwanda, Paul Thomas & Kristin Skinstad van der Kooij, *Cogent Education* (2018), 5: 1541495.

## Notes

1. It is for this reason, among others, that post-genocide educational efforts in Rwanda draw on the pedagogical experiences of organisations that provide professional teacher training in Holocaust education. Three such organisations are: the Educator's Institute for Human Rights, which has partnered with the renowned United States Holocaust Memorial, the Anne Frank House and the Aegis Trust Rwanda—the latter originally inspired by a visit to the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem (Gasabo, Mutanguha, & Mpayimana, 2016).
2. Idea shared with the authors by PhD candidate Merethe Skårås in a conversation on 26 September 2018. Skårås' research is on history education in South Sudan.

## References

- Ammert, N. (2013). *Historia som kunskap: Innehåll, mening och värden i möten med historia*. Svenska Historiska Media Förlag. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Barton, J. (2013). The hermeneutics of identity in African philosophical discourse as a framework for understanding ethnicity in post-genocide Rwanda. *Philosophia Africana*, 15(1), 1–34. doi:10.5840/philaficana20131517
- Bentrovato, D. (2015). Rwanda, twenty years on: Assessing the RPF's legacy through the views of the Great Lakes Region's new generation. In *Cahiers d'Études africaines* (pp. 231–254).
- Berelson, B. (1952). *Content analysis in communication research*. Hafner Press.
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buckley-Zistel, S. (2009). Nation, narration, unification? The politics of history teaching after the Rwandan genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 11(1), 31–53. doi:10.1080/14623520802703608
- Carney, J. J. (2012). Beyond tribalism: The Hutu-Tutsi question and Catholic rhetoric in colonial Rwanda. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 42(2), 172–202. doi:10.1163/157006612X646178
- Chakravarty, A. (2005). Gacaca courts in Rwanda: Explaining divisions within the human rights community. *Yale Journal Int'l Affairs*, 1, 132.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Shakman, K., Jong, C., Terrell, D. G., Barnatt, J., & McQuillan, P. (2009). Good and just teaching: The case for social justice in teacher education. *American Journal of Education*, 115(3), 347–377. The University of Chicago Press. doi:10.1086/597493
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. New York: Routledge.
- Czekanowski, J. (1960). *Investigations in the area between the Nile and the Congo*. (F. Scütze, Trans.). New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files, 1917, 1960.
- De Baets, A. (2009). *Responsible history*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Eramian, L. (2017). Testimony, disbelief, and opaque peace building in postgenocide Rwanda. *PoLAR. Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 40(1), 52–66. doi:10.1111/plar.12201
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. London and New York: Longman.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Freedman, S. W., Weinstein, H. M., Murphy, K. L., & Longman, T. (2011). Teaching history in post-genocide Rwanda. In S. Straus & L. Waldorf (Eds.), *Remaking Rwanda: State building and human rights after mass violence* (pp. 297–315). The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Fuji, L. A. (2008). The power of local ties: Popular participation in the Rwandan genocide. *Security Studies*, 17(3), 568–597. doi:10.1080/09636410802319578
- Gasabo, J. D., Mutanguha, F., & Mpayimana, A. (2016). Teaching about the Holocaust and genocide in Rwanda. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 3(3), 329–345. doi:10.1177/2347798916654583
- Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationalism*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Guest, R. (2013). *The shackled continent*. Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan.
- Guichaoua, A. (2015). *From war to genocide: Criminal politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Gundem, B. B. (2011). *Europeisk didaktikk: Tenkning og viten. (European didactics: Philosophy and knowledge)*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hannan, D. (2013). *Inventing freedom: How the English-speaking peoples made the modern world*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Hilker, L. M. (2011). The role of education in driving conflict and building peace: The case of Rwanda. *Prospects*, 2, 267–282. doi:10.1007/s11225-011-9193-7
- Hodgkin, M. (2006). Reconciliation in Rwanda: Education, history and the state. *Journal of International Affairs*, 60(1), 199–210.
- Holsti, O. (1969). *Content analysis in the social sciences and humanities*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Ingelaere, B. (2014). What's on a peasant's mind? Experiencing RPF state reach and overreach in post-genocide Rwanda (2000–10). *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 8(2), 214–230. doi:10.1080/17531055.2014.891783
- Isabela, S. (2012). The costs and consequences of Rwanda's shift in language policy. Al research. Background no. 30. Retrieved from <http://www.africaportal.org/articles/2012/05/31/costs-and-consequences-rwanda%E2%80%99s-shift-language-policy>
- Jefremovas, V. (1997). Contested identities: Power and the fictions of ethnicity, ethnography and history in Rwanda. *Anthropologica*, 91–104. doi:10.2307/25605855
- King, E. (2014). *From classrooms to conflict in Rwanda*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Körber, A. (2014). Historical thinking and historical competencies as didactic core concepts. In H. Bjerg (Ed.),

- Teaching historical memories in an intercultural perspective. Concepts and methods experiences and results from the TeacMem project* (pp. 69-96). Berlin: Metropol Verlag.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. London: Sage.
- Lemkin, R. (1933). Acts constituting a general (transnational) danger considered as offences against the law of nations. Retrieved from <http://www.preventgenocide.org/lemkin/madrid1933-english.htm>
- Longman, T. (2010). *Christianity and genocide in Rwanda*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Marchak, P. (2008). *No easy fix: Global responses to internal wars and crimes against humanity*. Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Mason, M. (2009). Critical thinking and learning. In M. Mason (Ed.), *Critical thinking and learning* (pp. 1-11). NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Meredith, M. (2005). *The state of Africa*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Moghalu, K. (2005). *Rwanda's genocide: The politics of global justice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Springer.
- Mupenzi, A. (2007). Interventions against poverty in Rwanda: A case study of ubuhede in Gatsibo district eastern province, Rwanda. Kampala: Makerere University, Uganda. Retrieved from [https://news.mak.ac.ug/documents/Makfiles/theses/Mupenzi\\_Alfred.pdf](https://news.mak.ac.ug/documents/Makfiles/theses/Mupenzi_Alfred.pdf)
- Newbury, C. (1980). *Uburetwa and Thangata: Catalysts to peasant political consciousness in Rwanda and Malawi*. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 1, 97-111.
- Paulson, J. (2015). "Whether and how?" History education about recent and ongoing conflict: A review of research. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 1(1), 14-47.
- Payne, G., & Payne, J. (2004). *Key concepts in social research*. London: Sage.
- Pottier, J. (2002). *Re-imagining Rwanda. Conflict, survival and disinformation in the late 20th Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robson, C. (1993). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioners-researchers*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Pushers.
- Rwanda Education Board. (2013). Retrieved November 14, 2016, from Rwanda Education Board <http://www.reb.rw/index.php?id=168>
- Sanders, E. R. (1969). The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its origin and functions in time perspective. *Journal of African History*, 10(4), 521-532. doi:10.1017/S0021853700009683
- Shaw, M. (2007). *What is genocide?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Straus, S., & Waldorf, L. (Eds.). (2011). *Remaking Rwanda: State building and human rights after mass violence*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Sundaram, A. (2016). *Bad news: Last journalists in a dictatorship*. London: Bloomsbury.
- The Guardian*. (2015). Rwanda places indefinite ban on BBC broadcasts over genocide documentary. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/jun/01/rwanda-places-indefinite-ban-on-bbc-broadcasts-over-genocide-documentary>
- Tosh, J. (2006). *The pursuit of history*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.
- Vansina, J. (2005). *Antecedents to modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya kingdom*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Verwimp, P. (2014). *Peasants in power*. Springer (ebook). Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-007-6434-7/page/1>
- Vidal, C. (1973). Colonisation et décolonisation du Rwanda: La question Tutsi-Hutu. *Revue Française d'études Politiques Africaines*, 91, 32-47.
- Waldorf, L. (2006). Rwanda's failing experiment in restorative justice. In D. Sullivan & L. Tifft (Eds.), *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, 422-434. London and New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.



© 2018 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions

You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

**Cogent Education (ISSN: 2331-186X) is published by Cogent OA, part of Taylor & Francis Group.**

**Publishing with Cogent OA ensures:**

- Immediate, universal access to your article on publication
- High visibility and discoverability via the Cogent OA website as well as Taylor & Francis Online
- Download and citation statistics for your article
- Rapid online publication
- Input from, and dialog with, expert editors and editorial boards
- Retention of full copyright of your article
- Guaranteed legacy preservation of your article
- Discounts and waivers for authors in developing regions

**Submit your manuscript to a Cogent OA journal at [www.CogentOA.com](http://www.CogentOA.com)**

